

MHR *Connections*

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Calgary human rights conference delivers

The 2011 annual conference of the Canadian Association of Statutory Human Rights Agencies (CASHRA) promised the over 350 participants the opportunity to become better prepared for the changes that are taking place in Canada as a result of our growing diversity. It delivered.

Chief Wilton Littlechild, Commissioner with the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada was a highlight for

many delegates, speaking eloquently and at times with humour of the history of residential schools and the challenges and successes in collecting statements from survivors and staff.

He spoke of the age factor of many of the survivors and the fact that the majority of the former school staff


During his moving and at times humorous presentation Chief Littlechild said that "it will take all of us working together to realize reconciliation."

have already passed away. He also talked about the difficulty of re-establishing trust with those the Commission needed to speak with after the resignation of the previous commissioners, saying it was like starting again at square one.

Chief Littlechild referred to the mission statement of the Commission, "The Truth and Reconciliation Commission will reveal the complete story of Canada's Residential School System, and lead the way to respect through reconciliation... for the child taken, for the parent left behind."

Other highlights of the conference included a plenary session that looked at the issue of the impact of human rights violations on others besides the victims. The discussion included different ways to restore trust and understanding in workplaces and communities where this has occurred. The panel members included Chief Littlechild, David Mullen and Linda Wilder and was facilitated by Manitoba Human Rights Board of Commissioners Chairperson Jerry Woods.

One of the workshops examined the need for ethical leadership in dealing with human rights issues that

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The Rights Connection by Jerry Woods, Chairperson

At the Human Rights Commission we often look to young people to help spread the word about human rights protections and responsibilities. At our youth conferences we always tell the students to take what they have learned back to their schools and communities. Nonetheless, we sometimes don't realize how much of an impact they can have when they put their passion and enthusiasm into action.

At the recent CASHRA conference one of the keynote speakers touched on his electoral success by doing the unexpected; he turned to young people.

Naheed Nenshi, was sworn in as Calgary's 36th Mayor on October 25, 2010. He is the first Muslim to become mayor of a major Canadian city. His unsuspected victory was covered extensively in the media, and his use of social media as communication tool was well documented. Another part of his success, which is less known, was his ability to connect with young people; even those too young to vote.

In his address Mayor Nenshi told this election story. During the campaign, he and all the others running for mayor of Calgary were asked to take part in many debates. On most occasions all the candidates showed up; except once. They had been asked to speak to a grade nine class. When Mayor Nenshi arrived at the school, he found himself on his own. He was later asked why he took the time to speak to students who were not even old enough to vote. His response was, "don't underestimate youth."

He obviously caught the students' attention and loyalty. Many of those he spoke to were seen at the University of Calgary encouraging older students to support Naheed Nenshi. On Election Day, they showed up again carrying placards stating "I can't vote, but you can."

The rest, as they say, is history. With a little help from those too young to vote, the long shot candidate won by a comfortable margin.

When we began our youth initiatives at the Human Rights Commission we recognized that if young people understood their rights and responsibilities at an early age, discrimination and harassment would not be as prevalent in their generation. What we have learned is what Mayor Nenshi noted; never underestimate the energy and dedication of youth.

Commission leads mental health evaluation project

The Manitoba Human Rights Commission has been selected as the Lead Organization for a project evaluating the Province's mental health legislation. The project, established by the Mental Health Commission of Canada and the Law Advisory Committee, asked the Canadian Mental Health Association (Winnipeg) and the Public Interest Law Centre of Legal Aid Manitoba to develop a tool to evaluate mental health legislation. It is hoped that the information gathered in three provinces will evaluate how well the legislation and policies reflect the principles and rights enshrined in the International Convention on the Rights of Persons with Mental Disabilities.

Dianna Scarth, Executive Director of the Manitoba Human Rights Commission, says she is very pleased that the Commission was given the opportunity to participate in the project as the lead organization in Manitoba. "With the increase in human rights complaints over the decade focusing on mental health issues, we know that this is one of the most challenging and important human rights issues in Canada today," she says.

The Commission's staff involved in the project are investigators Tanya Buschau, Ryan Redpath and Heather Unger.

The Commission chose members from various organizations including government, community groups and those with lived experience to form the Pilot Evaluation Team. The members of this team used the evaluation tool to answer questions on the provincial Mental Health Act and related provincial policies. It is anticipated that this information will help researchers determine to what extent Human Rights protections set out in the international covenant, which Canada has signed and agreed to implement, are reflected in current mental health legislation, policies, and standards.

"Asking people to volunteer their time to read policies and legislation is usually not an easy process," says Tanya Buschau, "however the interest in this project has been high." Ms Buschau adds that people are eager to share their knowledge and experience in this field. "The feedback we are receiving has been outstanding," she says.

The Commission is in the process of gathering the participants' responses to the questions, which will be passed on to researchers to be analysed alongside feedback from the two other provinces involved in the project, British Columbia and Nova Scotia.

The research project report will be presented in its final form to the Mental Health Commission of Canada.



As the host of next year's conference, Manitoba's Commission Chairperson Jerry Woods accepts the gift of a hat from Alberta's Chief Commissioner Blair Mason.

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affect transgendered people, who are considered one of the most vulnerable groups. The panel noted that recent changes to legislation have "delisted" sex reassignment surgery so it is not funded by Alberta Health Services any longer, an example of the challenges this group continues to face.

The sold out conference *Human Rights in Canada: New Directions, New Realities* took place June 13-15. Next year the 40th annual CASHRA conference will be in Winnipeg. Details of the Winnipeg Conference "Are we there yet?" will be released over the coming months.

Run for Rights a smashing success



Celeste Mackay, Jennine Scott, Sarah Lugtig, and Mariam Omar were enthusiastic participants in the 10th Anniversary of the annual Run for Rights. The run, held earlier this month, and a benefit concert raised over \$30,000. Net proceeds will be used to support human rights and social justice efforts at a local and international level.

They walked, ran, cycled and rollerbladed in support of human rights and social justice. The 10th Annual Run for Rights was the most successful ever with a record 423 registered runners, 17 participating organizations, and over 100 volunteers.

"I have seen every possibility from a unicyclist to a grandmother walking with her newborn granddaughter in her arms," said Sarah Lugtig, Crown Counsel for the Government of Manitoba.

Ms Lugtig, who also participates in the Manitoba Marathon, has run in the Run for Rights event for the past seven years. She says, however, that the *Run for Rights* has a unique quality. "It brings together people of diverse backgrounds, abilities, and identities.

Run for Rights is a coalition of diverse organizations working together to organize this specific event.

University of Winnipeg Global Studies major wins Top 20 Under 20

This month Ms Meagan Fultz, one of the youngest students at the University of Winnipeg, was selected to receive one of Canada's Annual Top 20 Under 20TM Awards created by Youth in Motion. The awards recognize and celebrate 20 young Canadians under the age of 20 for their outstanding innovation, achievement and leadership. The Manitoba Human Rights Commission staff and Commissioners congratulate Ms Fultz for her achievement.